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February 2017

# USDA e-News

## California Edition



**United States Department of Agriculture**

*Welcome to USDA e-News, California Edition, a multi-agency newsletter  
providing California's producers and other interested parties  
with current information.*

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## **Featured Item**

### **NRCS California Offers Post-Flood Assistance; Assessments Underway**

In the wake of recent California flooding, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in California is meeting with landowners and other agencies to assess damages and offer technical and financial assistance where possible. Assistance programs through NRCS include the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

#### **Watershed Assistance**

The program requires local government bodies or others to sponsor on-the-ground work including concrete barriers and streambank protection, mulching, and other damage control measures. Potential sponsors seeking assistance should do so through their local USDA service center <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=CA>.

#### **Landowner Technical Assistance**

NRCS may also be able to provide technical and educational assistance to landowners faced with

erosion and flooding in a damaged watershed. Agency conservationists have expertise in erosion, drainage and the use of measures (such as sand bags, mulching etc.) to mitigate damage to the landscape.

### **Farmer/Rancher Assistance**

EQIP can provide long-term support to repair erosion on agricultural lands such as gullies, streams, or hillsides. NRCS takes applications on an ongoing basis throughout the year and encourage interested landowners to contact their local offices for more information. For more information on available NRCS assistance, contact your local field office or visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

## **Updates**

### **February Crop Insurance Deadlines**

USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminds producers that the final dates to apply for crop insurance are fast approaching. The last day to purchase or change your policy is **February 1, 2017** for onions and **February 28, 2017** for the following crops: Corn, Cotton, Cultivated Wild Rice, Dry Beans, Figs, Grain Sorghum, Rice, and Whole Farm Revenue Protection. Producers need to purchase, review, or modify their crop insurance policies before these sales closing dates have passed. Crop insurance provides protection against crop production losses due to natural perils such as drought, hail, and excessive moisture. Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. In order to receive premium subsidies, the insured must certify that they meet [Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation](#) requirements (AD-1026) with Farm Service Agency (FSA). For more information contact your agent or you can find an agent online at the RMA [Agent Locator](#).

### **USDA Issues Safety-Net Payments to the Farmers in Response to 2015 Market Downturn**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced many of the 1.7 million farms that enrolled in either the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs will receive safety-net payments due to market downturns during the 2015 crop year. This fall, USDA will be making more than \$7 billion in payments under the ARC-County and PLC programs to assist participating producers, which will account for over 10 percent of USDA's projected 2016 net farm income.

These payments will help provide reassurance to America's farm families, who are standing strong against low commodity prices compounded by unfavorable growing conditions in many parts of the country. Overall, 76 percent of participating farm base acres are enrolled in ARC-County, 23 percent in PLC and one percent in ARC-Individual. For other program information including frequently asked questions, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc).

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

## **Funding Opportunities**

### **USDA Invites Applications for Rural Business Development Grant Program**

USDA Rural Development California is accepting applications for the [Rural Business Development Grant](#) (RBDG) Program. RBDG grants are available to public bodies, non-profit organizations and federally recognized tribal groups to finance and facilitate business development projects in rural areas.

The RBDG program can assist with targeted technical assistance such as marketing and feasibility studies and business plans, purchasing equipment for small and emerging businesses, creating a revolving loan fund, and supporting rural distance learning programs for educational or job-training. Grants will be awarded competitively at the state level. A Native American set-aside program is funded through a national competition.

Interested applicants are encouraged to contact a [local Rural Development office](#) for more details about the program and how to apply. Applications for Native American set-aside funds must be received in the local Rural Development office by 4:00 pm PST on **Friday, March 17, 2017**. All other applications are due by 4:00 pm on **Monday, April 17, 2017**.

### **USDA-NRCS and CARCD to launch 3<sup>rd</sup> Round of Outreach Mini Grants**

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) to launch 3<sup>rd</sup> Grant cycle for Outreach Mini Grants. NRCS California is partnering with CARCD to provide small outreach grant opportunities for Ag Partners, Non-Profit Organizations and RCD's for resource conservation projects to historically underserved producers. Grant cycle will begin February 1, 2017 with a maximum grant total of \$2,000.00. The grant funds may be used to supplement ongoing conservation outreach efforts and do not require a new project be developed. For grant details contact Kristen Murphy, Project Coordinator at [Kristen-murphy@carcd.org](mailto:Kristen-murphy@carcd.org) or 916-520-9404 or Victor M. Hernandez, Outreach Specialist and Sociologist at [victor.hernandez@ca.usda.gov](mailto:victor.hernandez@ca.usda.gov) or 530-792-5628.

### **USDA Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced recently the availability of a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. The program, called EZ Guarantee Loans, uses a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to \$100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations.

USDA unveiled a new category of lenders that will join traditional lenders, such as banks and credit unions, in offering USDA EZ Guarantee Loans. Microlenders, which include Community Development Financial Institutions and Rural Rehabilitation Corporations, will be able to offer their customers up to \$50,000 of EZ Guaranteed Loans, helping to reach urban areas and underserved producers. Banks, credit unions and other traditional USDA-approved lenders, can offer customers up to \$100,000 to help with agricultural operation costs.

EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent.

More than half of all FSA loans go to new farmers and more than a quarter to underserved borrowers. FSA also offers loans of up to \$5,000 to young farmers and ranchers through the Youth Loan Program. Loans are made to eligible youth to finance agricultural projects, with almost 9,000 young people now participating. More information about the available types of FSA farm loans can be found at [www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans) or by contacting your local FSA office. To find your nearest office location, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

## **\$8 Million Fund Created to Improve Water Quality and Conserve Greater Sage-Grouse in the Eastern Sierra**

The USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) has created an \$8 million fund to support initiatives conserving the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse and enhancing ranch water quality in the region. The \$8 million fund will be available for five years to landowners in portions of Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties of California and portions of Douglas, Lyon, Carson City, Mineral, and Esmeralda Counties in Nevada. Ranchers can apply to receive funds from this pool in order to complete projects that will enhance sage-grouse habitat and improve water quality on property they own and manage. Any landowner interested in pursuing a project that will benefit the goals of the RCPP is encouraged to contact Susanna Danner, ESLT Land Conservation Program Director, at (760) 873-4554 or [susanna@eslt.org](mailto:susanna@eslt.org).

## **Reports and Publications**

### **NASS Reports**

[Preliminary Grape Crush Report](#) (02/10/17)

[Olive Inventory](#) (02/21/17)

## **Other Activities and Events**

### **2016 Ag Resource Management Survey (ARMS) to Provide Benchmark Data for Milk**

ARMS is a joint effort of NASS and USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS). Beginning in January and continuing through early April, NASS will be gathering information about farm economics and production practices from farmers and ranchers across the U.S. This year, the survey will provide additional cost of production data for organic and conventional milk operations. Data from the 2016 ARMS can be used as a benchmark for the dairy industry, telling the story of California dairies before the USDA releases a decision on the proposed federal milk marketing order. The data will also be used to assess the crop insurance choices made by farmers, helping policymakers better understand the impact of crop insurance offerings on farm production decisions and financial outcomes. NASS will continue data collection for ARMS through early April. For more information, visit [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) or contact Jennifer Johnson, [Jennifer.Johnson@nass.usda.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Johnson@nass.usda.gov) in the Pacific Regional Office at 916-498-8936.

### **Certified Organic Survey for 2016 Data Begins Early February**

NASS is now conducting the 2016 Certified Organic Survey to gather additional data on acreage, production, and sales for certified organic crops and livestock. Your response is critical to help inform program and policy decisions, such as developing more accurate organic crop insurance coverage provided by USDA's Risk Management Agency. Please complete and return your form by February 17, 2017. You may respond in either of the following ways: Online at [www.agcounts.usda.gov](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov). All you need is the 17-digit survey code on the enclosed form to begin. By mail. Complete the enclosed form and mail it back in the return envelope provided. The results of this survey will be available in aggregate form only, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified as required by federal law. If you have additional questions, contact Juan Albelo at [Juan.Albelo@nass.usda.gov](mailto:Juan.Albelo@nass.usda.gov) or 916-498-5161. To learn more, visit [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov).

### **Cash Rents Survey Begins Feb 22**

NASS will mail the Cash Rents survey on February 22 and will collect data until July. The results of this survey will be available in August. The Cash Rents Survey provides the basis for county estimates of the cash rent paid for irrigated cropland, non-irrigated cropland, and pasture. If you have additional questions, contact Roberto Sanchez at [Roberto.Sanchez@nass.usda.gov](mailto:Roberto.Sanchez@nass.usda.gov) or 916-498-5161. To learn more, visit [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov).

## **USDA NASS and NRCS Continue Project to Gather Conservation Data Nationwide**

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is contacting farmers and ranchers from now through early 2017 as part of the second phase of a national survey of conservation practices. During the first phase of the National Resources Inventory (NRI) – Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), NASS contacted California farmers and ranchers to determine if their operations and properties met eligibility criteria to participate in the survey. CEAP's purpose is to measure the environmental benefits associated with implementation and installation of conservation practices on cultivated and non-cultivated agricultural lands, according to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the lead agency for the project. NASS conducts the survey for CEAP under a cooperative agreement with NRCS. For more information, visit [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) or call Michael Landis in the Pacific Regional Office at 916-498-8940.

### **Questions about a survey from USDA NASS?**

Call NASS at 1-800-851-1127 or email [nassrfopcr@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nassrfopcr@nass.usda.gov).

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## **Contact Us**

If you would like to receive a copy of future newsletters or if you have relevant information for California producers that you want to include in a future issue of this newsletter, please email one of the contacts listed below. Please be advised that not all activities may be published.

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